

Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks:

Take a Quiet Hike on the Gilbert Gaul Trail at Fall Creek Falls

By Fran Wallas

In the summer when the waterfalls are shrinking and the park crowds are growing, you may want to take the Gilbert Gaul Trail, a less traveled trail at Fall Creek Falls State Park near Spencer.

The Gilbert Gaul loop trail starts at the left of the gate. There is a trail sign giving you a choice of starting the loop toward the cabins or to the right. Begin the trail by going to the right on an old roadbed. The gently rolling trail is a fairly easy hike. You will enjoy the shady walk through the hardwood forest. The trail soon heads downhill to a large open grassy field. This field was part of Gilbert Gaul's home and studio. Gilbert Gaul was a famous artist who moved to this land in 1881 when he inherited the farm from his uncle. He painted scenes of both Confederate and Union soldiers and his work is found in the Smithsonian and other museums.

Follow the mowed path through the field down the woodland road. Pine beetles killed the dead pine trees next to the trail. The downed trees provide habitat for wildlife.

The path goes to Fall Creek Lake and turns left. Hopefully you will begin to get a nice breeze. The trail runs along the lakeside for several miles. Although you are not allowed to swim in the lake, you can sit on a log and cool your feet in the water. You may scare a few ducks and

geese resting on shore or be lucky enough to see an Osprey. If you are hiking early in the morning or late in the day, you will probably see deer feeding nearby.

About half way along the trail, you come to the Frazier rain shelter that provides a quiet place to enjoy the view. Nearby are remains of trees that were sculpted by beavers.

The trail crosses areas that look like they may be trails, but stay along the lake until you get to a sign that says "trail" and "cabins." Instead of going to the cabins, you will turn left and start hiking uphill. This is a very steep part of the trail and the only reason to rate the trail as moderate. There are several splits in the trail that go around wooded islands, but all end up together. The easiest way is to always take the main path left around these spots. When you get to the top of the hill, you will be back at the parking area.

Ticks can sometimes be a problem when you are hiking, so take appropriate precautions.

If you want to stay and take other hikes, try the walk-in campsites in campground A, E loop. The campsites are more remote than car camping, but closer to civilization than backpacking. The sites give you the feel of being alone in the woods without really being alone in the woods.



Pine trees reflected in Fall Creek Lake at Fall Creek Falls State Park. *Below:* The trailhead of the Gilbert Gaul Trail at Fall Creek Falls State Park.

Directions

From Nashville take I-40 to exit 288 and take Highway 111 South until you get to Spencer. Turn left on Highway 284 East and follow the signs to Fall Creek Falls State Park. From Knoxville, take I-40 to Crossville to exit 322 Peavine Road. Take a left off the exit and turn right at the light on Highway 101. Take Highway 101 to Highway 30. Turn right on Highway 30. Drive until you get to the park entrance on the left. Once you have reached the park follow the signs to the inn. Just past the turnoff on the right leading to the Fall Creek Falls Gulf, you will come to a silver historical marker about Gilbert Gaul. Turn right on the road just past the marker to the Youth Camp 2. Leave your car at the parking area next to the youth camp gate.

Fall Creek Falls State Park



(Fran Wallas is an avid hiker. She works as an attorney for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation in Nashville. You can read about her other Great Hikes in Tennessee State Parks at www.tn.gov/environment/greathikes.)



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